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27 January 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR: Hal Ford
Graham Fuller

FROM: George Kolt
NIO for Europe

SUBJECT: Estimates

1. I fully support the goal of making our estimates as concise and relevant as possible. we must guard, however, against creating a procrustean bed for our projects--procrustean in the sense that our estimates could become artificially limited in length and could increasingly deal only with the day's headline issue at the expense of more fundamental strategic problems. In the process we would begin acquiring the reputation of ONE in its waning days--prone to excathedra pronouncements and preachy ones at that.

2. Rather than devising rules for estimates writ large, I think we should first consider the different kinds of estimates we write and then devise appropriate guidelines. In my view there are four types of estimates:

a. SNIEs. They should address one or two very clearly defined questions of immediate relevance to policymakers. They should indeed be short--10-15 double spaced pages. Current examples of this type of product are Fritz's on Afghanistan and mine on The Portuguese Presidential Elections.

b. NIEs about problem areas. They should treat situations which may not require immediate decisions but which are developing in such a way that they are likely to become dilemmas for policymakers in the near future--presenting them either with danger or with opportunities. The goal here should be about 40 double spaced pages, less if possible. An example would be the recent Memorandum to Holders on Romania that Fritz and I produced.

c. NIEs dealing in some depth with situations of strategic significance, and which, therefore, require periodic reappraisal but not necessarily policy departures. The guidelines should be very

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loose here but I think the aim should be for products around 50 to 75 double spaced pages. Examples of this type of product would be the estimates that were done on the USSR and the Third World, Pressures for Economic Political and Change in Eastern Europe and the one that we are currently doing on Hungary.

d. Larry's Estimates. They are uniformly long, widely read, appreciated by policymakers and used for decisionmaking at many levels of government. The moral of this is that substance is more important than length.

3. Questions may well be raised about the advisability of doing the estimates that I have described under c of above. It could be argued that these products will inevitably be long and have more in common with research papers than with estimates; an art form intended to deliver crisp estimative judgments. I would certainly agree that we should not become overly committed to those types of estimates, but there is value in them. They may be the only estimates that we do which are not produced under the press of events, take the reader beyond today's immediate concerns, and in that way be truly thought provoking and strategic. Fritz's estimate on Domestic Stresses in the Soviet System or the aforementioned one on Eastern Europe are cases in point. In regard to this East European estimate it is worth noting that Rick Burt (at that time Assistant Secretary of State for the USSR and Europe) judged this relatively long estimate--25 printed pages--so outstanding that he commended it to Secretary Shultz for reading in its entirety and so told Bob Gates in a thank you note. Besides serving policymakers these longer broader estimates also force the Community to think about problems and prepare it to produce fast-track SNIEs on a more topically focused issue when the need arises. Thus I think that this type of estimate serves a useful function even though it is hard to make it conform to the current buzzwords.

4. As I stated at the outset, I fully agree with the need to make our estimates as concise and focused as possible, but I am concerned that our enthusiasm to do so may carry us too far. I would welcome a collegial discussion of the points that I have raised.



George Kolt

cc: C/NIC

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